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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 007922

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PTER SNAR KJUS CO

SUBJECT: ICRC ON PROSPECTS FOR TALKS ON HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE

REF: A. BOGOTA 7712 (NOTAL)

1B. BOGOTA 7590 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Anne T. Callaghan  
Reasons: 1.4 (b,d)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) ICRC Head of Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer (protect) said August 18 that he was not optimistic about the prospects for a GOC agreement with the FARC on an humanitarian exchange. He said the ICRC is prepared to accompany FARC members to a meeting place with the GOC and remain with them for up to three days following the meeting to ensure GOC security guarantees are kept. In Schaerer's view, the FARC is interested in an humanitarian exchange because it wants to boost its international credibility as a "political" organization. Schaerer said Spain, unlike France, could play a constructive role in the GOC's efforts to secure hostages' release and with the EU on paramilitary demobilization. In Schaerer's view, there are too many players engaged in trying to secure an agreement on humanitarian exchange talks and their efforts are not coordinated. End summary.

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ICRC OFFERS TO ACCOMPANY, REMAIN WITH FARC  
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12. (C) Schaerer told D/PolCouns and Refugee Coordinator August 18 that the FARC would call him to discuss logistics if and when they were to reach agreement with the GOC on a meeting place for humanitarian exchange talks. The ICRC had previously offered to accompany FARC members to the meeting place. The ICRC would be prepared to remain with FARC members for up to three days following the end of a meeting to ensure that the GOC's security guarantees were effective.

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FARC WANTS POLITICAL RECOGNITION, SECURITY GUARANTEES  
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13. (C) Schaerer said the FARC is interested in a humanitarian exchange primarily to bolster its credibility as a political organization that exchanges "soldiers for soldiers" with the government. Schaerer said FARC leader Marulanda has wanted such international recognition for years.

14. (C) In Schaerer's view, the municipalities of either Florida or Pradera in the Valle del Cauca are viable meeting places for the FARC because they are close to traditional FARC spheres of influence. The issue of "demilitarizing" such areas is something of a red herring, he said, because the municipalities contain few GOC military personnel. Schaerer suggested that an agreed meeting place would require a "security perimeter" which the GOC and FARC would commit to keep free of military forces.

15. (C) Schaerer said the FARC would insist on security guarantees for its members who attend any meeting with the GOC. The FARC's concern is less about its members' arrival at an agreed meeting place than with their departure. According to Schaerer, the FARC fears that the military could attack at the conclusion of a meeting.

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COMPARING ROLES OF FRANCE AND SPAIN  
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16. (C) Schaerer stated that France is "overly emotional" on the hostage issue and is not playing a constructive role in discussions associated with a humanitarian exchange. For example, the ICRC asked the FARC to release all hostages who are suffering from physical or mental ailments, and then France complicated matters by immediately adding, "and all the women". In Schaerer's view, France has some credibility with the FARC but none with the GOC. Spain, on the other hand, has credibility with the GOC and appears to be playing a more useful role. Schaerer said Uribe's recent meeting with Zapatero raised the possibility of an informal deal, in which the GOC's progress on humanitarian exchange would be met by Spain's efforts to persuade the EU to back implementation of the Justice and Peace law.

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HOW COURT RULING COULD AFFECT HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE  
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17. (C) In Schaerer's view, the FARC would remain interested in an humanitarian exchange even if the Constitutional Court rules in favor of Uribe's right to seek immediate reelection.

Schaerer discounted the view that the FARC is likely to attack to undermine Uribe's image as a president who has delivered both security and government services. Such a FARC offensive would, he said, be counterproductive because it would almost certainly strengthen, not diminish, Uribe's popularity.

18. (C) If the Court rules against Uribe's right to seek immediate reelection, Schaerer said the FARC would probably wait until a new president was inaugurated in August 2006 to restart "talks about talks." He reasoned that the FARC would not want to give Uribe a "parting gift" of hostages released.

Schaerer thought it possible, albeit unlikely, that the FARC would "thank" the Court for such a ruling by releasing some hostages.

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MEETING COULD BE BEST CASE SCENARIO IN SHORT TERM  
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19. (C) Schaerer is not optimistic about the prospects for an humanitarian exchange at this point. He said there are too many actors involved in the "talks about talks," and too many public statements. (Note: as reported ref B, Father Dario Echeverri, Secretary General of the National Conciliation Commission, is in Europe this week to meet with Spanish, Swiss, and French authorities and try to coordinate better the various peace efforts. End note.) The "best case scenario" in the short term, according to Schaerer, would be an agreement for the GOC and FARC to meet. He expects the FARC to insist on the return of some of its heavyweight operatives (he mentioned Rodrigo Granda) and the GOC to resist.

CALLAGHAN